

Libraries of Washington State

Tips for Effective Grassroots Advocacy

Caring enough about your library to argue in support of funding and policy that help your library advance mission and serve your community is a valuable gift. When you step forward as an advocate for the library you are putting the library in the spotlight, and should be reflecting the values, mission and vision of your organization. As you approach various grassroots activities, here are a few key things to keep in mind to ensure you are as effective as possible in your advocacy with elected or appointed officials.

1. Be passionate: Believe in what you say. Speak with conviction. If you don't care, why should anyone else?

2. Know your elected official and staff person: Do your homework! Have a good idea of what interest your particular elected has in your issues. This is critical to a good presentation. You can do everything else well, but if what you're saying is irrelevant to them, you will not be effective. Demonstrate how the issue you represent affects them **and** their constituency.

3. Know your topic: You're there because you believe in the library. Make sure you're up to speed on the facts, background materials and the current state of the issue. Have your briefing information on hand for your meeting. Make it good—after all, you're from the community's most vital information resource: the library!

4. Have a clear objective: Know what you want. Your meetings will often be very short (10-15 minutes is typical). Make sure you get your message across right away. Know 2-3 key phrases that tell your elected what you want and why in a elected fashion. Be concrete.

5. Explain what's at stake: Spell out not only what you want, but what will happen if it isn't done. How will the outcome help or harm the elected's constituency. Illustrate using examples and facts to support your position.

6. Put a human face on it: Telling stories about real people, even you, is the BEST way to illustrate what's at stake and why doing what you've asked matters.

7. Keep the big picture in mind: Knowing your issue is a first step, but to really connect with your elected, you need to understand the context they're operating in. What are the major issues in the area your elected represents? What else is competing for attention/resources? Knowing this helps the elected recognize that you know there are choices to be made, and helps you show why your request is critical. Whenever possible, link your issue to the top priorities (e.g. education, school funding, literacy, unemployment—whatever it is, the library can usually help!)

8. Empower the Audience: Give your elected or staff person an opportunity to get on board and involved. You've got their attention with your passion and knowledge: don't let them off the hook! Make sure you ask for their buy-in. Give them a specific opportunity to commit to take some action to advance your goal. Know where they stand when you leave the meeting and get firm commitment.

9. Follow up. Don't just ask for the commitment and assume it will happen. Keep in touch, push for the elected to do what they said they would do. If they don't, ask why and what it will take for them to honor their commitment to the library.